

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Past Meets Future in Lincoln Park, MD

Maizie Cummings
Terry Lachin
Sharyn Duffin
Dale Pastor
The Lincoln Park Partners Project

Demographic changes are affecting older neighborhoods across the nation. Lincoln Park, a historically black neighborhood in suburban Maryland, is coping with similar issues as newer immigrant groups alter the cultural landscape of the area. Platted in 1891 as a Negro subdivision adjacent to the B&O Railroad line, Lincoln Park was annexed by the city of Rockville in 1949. Today's residents, many of whom are descendants of the original 19th-century landowners, are coping with rapid demographic change by documenting and promoting their community's history through a public-private collaboration.

In 2000, residents joined with a consortium of local organizations, including Peerless Rockville (a historic preservation group), United Black Cultural Center, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville Regional Library, and Montgomery County Historical Society to form Lincoln Park Partners Project (LPPP). Their objectives include identifying historical resources, producing a resource guide, and creating a website illustrating and documenting Lincoln Park's history, development, and social and spiritual life. The website is hosted by the Rockville Regional Library and is available online at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Content/Libraries/lpark/lpproject.asp>.

LPPP collaborates with residents to document Lincoln Park's history and long-standing tradition of community activism. Throughout the late 19th- to mid-20th century, Lincoln Park espoused the cause of equality of education. In 1867, freedmen petitioned the local school board for a teacher, agreeing to pay the teacher's living expenses and the schoolhouse's fuel and lights. In 1876, the Rockville Colored Elementary School opened. By 1927, the town established Rockville Colored High School. When a new building was acquired in 1936, the high school moved to Lincoln Park, and was renamed Lincoln High School.

Lincoln Park's desire for adequate schooling was tied to the larger battle for civil rights. In 1936, local teacher and principal William

B. Gibbs filed a lawsuit seeking equal pay with his white contemporaries. Thurgood Marshall, then a young attorney with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), represented Gibbs, whose case was settled successfully out of court in 1937. Gibbs and other early suits were instrumental to the NAACP's strategy of attacking the discriminatory system through legal action, building to the 1954 United States Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which overturned the "separate but equal" standard previously enforced. Lincoln Park was also active in organizing boycotts, rallies, and sit-ins to eliminate barriers in housing and public accommodations.

To honor the community's contributions toward school desegregation, LPPP is participating in programs commemorating the 50th anniversary of the *Brown* decision. Local residents, historians, and educators, whose stories document the segregation and integration of Montgomery County Public schools, are making connections with today's students and residents, ensuring that the spirit of Lincoln Park continues.

LPPP's next step is to document the demographic shift in the community since the mid-1980s, when increasing numbers of Latino, Asian, and other immigrant groups began arriving, attracted to its convenient public transportation and affordable housing. LPPP is collaborating with the city of Rockville to commemorate Lincoln Park's history and allocate resources to continue documenting the community. LPPP and others are also working to nominate the Lincoln Park community to the National Register of Historic Places.



Formerly a high school for the Rockville African-American community, Lincoln High School now serves as a school board administrative building and is leased to other nonprofit organizations. Photograph courtesy of Richard Andrews, Peerless Rockville.